



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Drowning a Major Killer of Utah Children

UDOH, Utah SAFE KIDS Coalition Promote Water Safety Initiative

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Playing in the water is one of the great joys of childhood. Yet drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among Utah children ages 14 and under, according to new Utah Department of Health (UDOH) data.

According to the new research, 30 Utah children ages 14 and under died in Utah lakes and rivers, bathtubs and pools from 2000 – 2002. Another nine youth ages 15-19 drown during that same time period. Nationally, drowning and near drowning sends as many as 2,700 children to U.S. hospital emergency rooms every year. And 20 percent of all near drowning survivors suffer severe, permanent brain damage.

This May, the Utah SAFE KIDS Coalition and the UDOH will highlight a water safety initiative called “*Splash into Safety!*” As part of this nationwide program, the coalition will host several water safety events statewide to help parents, caregivers and children learn how to stay safe in the water this summer.

“Because there are so many ways children can drown, parents must be constantly aware of what their children are doing,” said Janet Brooks, co-chair of the Utah SAFE KIDS Coalition. “At home, please don’t leave young children in the bathtub alone, or even with older siblings, while you answer the door or the phone,” Brooks said. “Use toilet seat locks, and make sure there are no buckets of water left where children can find them.”

Outside, provide constant supervision when children are in or near water, including home and neighborhood pools. At commercial pools, don’t count on lifeguards to watch your

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young ones every minute. It's estimated that 500 people drown every year in pools and bodies of water *where lifeguards are present*.

The UDOH data back up the battle cry of injury prevention experts: "There is no substitute for supervision," said Cyndi Bemis, Media and Education Coordinator for the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. "The data show that in nearly every Utah outdoor drowning, a young child wandered off alone and fell into a pool, hot tub or canal," she said. In nearly every bathtub drowning case, the child died because the parent left the room for just a minute, and the child went under. Several Utah children have also died when a parent left them alone to bathe with an older sibling.

The key to drowning prevention outdoors is personal flotation devices (PFDs). No one should ever board a boat without one on. Parents should know that "floaties," swim rings and other water play toys are just that—toys—and will not prevent drowning. "We know children think PFDs are too confining," said Bemis. "But confined is better than dead. So put a PFD on every child, even if they are just playing at the water's edge," she said. "You never know when they'll wander away or when a dangerous current is just a few feet from shore."

Injuries are predictable, and that means they are preventable. Learn more about keeping your children safe from drowning and other injury by attending a Utah SAFE KIDS Coalition event in your area. These FREE events will include prizes and fun, interactive games and activities for parents, caregivers, and children. For more information drowning prevention and other injury prevention tips, go to health.utah.gov/vipp.

Note to editors: For more information on child drowning, please see the attached fact sheet. For a complete list of SAFE KIDS events, see the attached .pdf file. Or visit health.utah.gov/vipp

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.